

## Riding a political bicycle

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The ongoing process of party building at all parts of the political spectrum can be seen as a typical feature of the contemporary Ukraine. New parties emerge in standard and thoroughly tested procedures, with nobody trying to invent a Ukrainian version of the political bicycle. The logic and internal driving forces of the political party processes are almost identical to the logic of party building practiced shortly before the 1998 parliamentary elections.

First, new political parties are being established, with new political leaders coming to the front lines. Second, political parties multiply themselves by means of division into two or more groups. Third, only a very lazy political leader have not tried - or announced the intention to try and initiate a political block or a coalition. The intensity of political party processes is a rather clear political symptom that allows assuming that representatives of Ukraine's political class are carefully preparing for the new parliamentary elections. Although the next parliamentary elections are scheduled to take place in spring 2002, the actions of Ukrainian political parties (unusually early for Ukrainian election campaigns) suggest that a large number of representatives of the political class do not exclude the possibility of early elections and get ready - just to be on the safe side.

The moods of residents of the political Olympus are closely linked to ways and terms of implementation of amendments to the Constitution of Ukraine pursuant to the results of the April 16 referendum (for details, see Research Update No. 169 and No. 174). Meanwhile, officials of the Presidential Administration have made a number of statements on the issue, denying the possibility of early elections following the referendum results. In early May 2000, Presidential chief of staff Volodymyr Lytvyn argued there were neither economic, nor political, nor legal grounds for early parliamentary elections (Den, May 17, 2000), it is hard not to see the linkage between the implementation process and the current political realities. While getting ready for an election race, on July 13 members of the parliament cast 251 votes in support of the President's draft bill on making amendments to the Constitution. Yet, that was only the first step towards changing the Constitution in a way that will significantly reshape the Ukrainian political landscape. The next step, the implementation of changes itself, is expected to take place during the autumn-2000 session and gather support of at least 300 MPs. The results are likely to determine the future of this parliament and schedule the next parliamentary elections.

The possibility of early parliamentary elections remains a determining factor of the political process in Ukraine that programs streamlined party building. A key feature of this process is the major election potential of left-wing political parties, primarily the Communist party of Ukraine (CPU). According to an opinion poll, conducted in April 2000 by the Kyiv Center for Political Research and Conflict Studies, about 22.5% of the respondents were prepared to vote for Communists - which is not unusual, given the deteriorating economic situation. The left sector of the election pie is a desired award for a number of other political forces that enhance their ideological rhetoric with creating and renovating left-wing political parties. The technology was first announced by leader of the Vidrodzhennya Rehioniv (Renaissance of the Regions) Oleksandr Volkov in January 2000: we still have some time ahead, and, you know, I won't be surprised if another such orthodox party emerges, and then let them tangle with each other... We are able to create another such party (Nezavisimost, January 27, 2000). Obviously, one should not overestimate abilities of individual political personalities to engage in successful party-building, but such statements only illustrate the general trend and add spice to the party cloning process.

Hence, the starting gun fired, and the results were quick. In Spring 2000 the left wing of the political spectrum received two new members: the National Association of Left Forces Solidarnist (NALFS), led by former activist of Oleksandr Moroz's Socialist Party of Ukraine (SPU), and a remake of the Young Communist League, the Ukrainian Communist Youth Union chaired by ex-communist Oleksandr Starynets. The emergence of these political formations materialized the idea of establishing another Communist party - a reinvigorated alternative to the Communist Party of Ukraine. Yet, it would be incorrect to class the new formations among traditional communist parties, as they are obviously far from the communist ideology and tend to shift noticeably towards social-democratic ideas and slogans. Ivan Chyzh's NALFS, whether he wants it or not, looks like a viable alternative to the SPU rather than to the orthodox communists.

Yet, the process is far from complete. As the practice has shown, the relevant technologies are being implemented successfully and are likely to be used in the future. In this context it is worth noting the creation, in mid-July 2000,

of a new Communist party, the CPU(o). Unlike in the title of the United Socialist Democrats SDPU(o) - the new Communists' (o) stands for onovlena, i.e., renovated. The party's official creator is former Progressive Socialist, now member of the Ukrainian parliament and member of the Trudova Ukraina (Working Ukraine) faction Mykhailo Savenko, elected to lead the party by the CPU(o) foundation congress. Given the party leader's membership of the Trudova Ukraina, it's not so hard to guess what sort of political forces are behind the scenes of the emergence of the Communist alternative. Materials of the foundation congress of the CPU(o), provided to the Den newspaper by the press service of the Trudova Ukraina, declare the necessity to revise the left-wingers' traditional approaches to cooperation with all political parties [and] drop the leftists' screened oppositionism (Den, July 20, 2000).

Apparently, the CPU(o) is being prepared for a peculiar political future in collaboration with other political forces that are rather distant from general left ideas. The goal, naturally, is to broaden substantially the election potential of the interested political forces. This assumption is well backed by Mykhailo Savenko's statements. According to its leader, the CPU(o) intends to initiate establishment of a major block to take part in the 2002 parliamentary elections. The block is expected to include pro-democracy parties of the left, as well as the right part of the political spectrum, including the Ukrainian Cossack, parties of the centrist type, including Christian [parties] that strive to build a parliamentary republic and the state of the people's power in Ukraine. After the CPU(o) builds up muscles, we and Symonenko will share votes, the new party's leader claims (Den, July 20, 2000). This suggests a conclusion that the CPU(o) sees itself as an alternative to the CPU and will fight for votes with it. However, the expansion of the tentative block indicates that this may not be exactly the case...

The renovated communists try to identify their own political credo and relations with other left-wing political parties: the national renovated Communist alternative does not claim either the heritage of the CPSU or any special affection of the CPU or the SPU. The key claims are for voters' understanding, and the main grounds [for that] is the sense that we are right that has always been inherent in true communists. In addition, the CPU(o) promises that the future of Ukraine is the future of a great, free state that lives in friendship and harmony with all peoples. It must have an established working, civil society with a democratic socially oriented state and a multi-form economy (Ukraina Moloda, July 19, 2000). Again, one may suspect that the new party may cause damage not only to the traditional CPU's electoral harvest, but also to that of the SDPU(o).

The official foundation statements of the renovated communists refer to civil society and mixed economy that are usual social democratic appeals. Therefore, the logical question is why that social-democratic political party keeps calling itself Communist?

The renovated communists announce that they are prepared to cooperate with everybody who supports our idea of building a socially just society based on a parliamentary form of governance, and [we] are not going to be in opposition to the election [elected?] authorities. We do not aim at splitting up the left camp. We simply have to make it more healthy and, having gathered the most active and the most progressive part of it around ourselves, restore the Communists' past influence and authority (Ukraina Moloda, July 19, 2000). Yet, it is still a question whether party will be really able to transform its intentions into realities and whether the traditional CPU devotees will be prepared to support the renovated alternative. Why not - provided the promotional campaign is done skillfully and the investment in the new party is not too small. Hence, the CPU(o) may succeed if not in winning the next elections that in swallowing a fair share of votes usually gathered by the Communists - a technology that proved to be rather effective during the 1998 parliamentary elections.

The central part of the political spectrum is also going through noticeable agitation period, preparing for all possible outcomes of the forthcoming implementation process.

On July 16, 2000, the second congress of the Party of Solidarity of Ukraine elected Petro Poroshenko, MP and leader of the Solidarnist parliamentary group as its new leader. The congress of the Party of Solidarity of Ukraine (PSU), established in 1997, was attended by delegates of all of its regional branches and members of the Ukrainian parliament, members of the Solidarnist group Ivan Popesku, Oleksandr Chubatenko, Volodymyr Semynozhenko. Speaking to the congress, Petro Poroshenko, MP, announced that the new leadership's task will be to bring the party to a new quality of movement and, having accumulated sufficient political forces, become the ruling party of the state (Silski Visti, July 18, 2000).

Mr. Poroshenko's way to party leadership was neither long nor difficult. In early March 2000, he unexpectedly fell out of the nest of the United Socialist Democrats' parliamentary faction and initiated the formation of the Solidarnist group that included representatives the left-wing Peasants' Party of Ukraine, formerly the ally of the Socialists, and its leader Serhiy Dovhan. Election technology specialists may note here that a party that has been a political outsider and did not take part in the recent parliamentary elections not has a parliamentary faction of its own.

Political party leaders have finally learned to treat elections seriously and prepare well in advance. In the context of changes and possible early elections, the PSU chairman warns that as soon as in autumn the PSU will be able to

show itself as a political force of new quality (Ukraina Moloda, May 18, 2000). According to the party leader, key priorities of the party agenda coincide with priorities of the parliamentary group [and include] support for a national producer and specific work [aiming at] increasing the level of social security of the working people. And these are not going to be some populist events, we will not make demagogic statements and will not give unrealistic tasks to the government (Den, July 19, 2000).

This, however, was not the final point of institutionalization of the PSU. On July 18, five party leaders, encouraged by the PSU chairman, made a joint statement about having agreed in principle to unite into one political party. The name has not been invented yet, but it is going to include the Party of Regional Renaissance (led by mayor of Donetsk Volodymyr Rybak), the Party for a Beautiful Ukraine (chaired by Leonid Chernovetsky), the Valentyn Landyk's Party of Labor, and Andriy Kapusta's Party of Pensioners. The merger is supposed to be done in several stages. In September the parties are going to hold congresses to elect leaders of the new party, and in October or November the Ukrainian centrism is likely to be joined by yet another political formation.

The merger is supposed to be based on the principles of new centrism. According to creator of that ideological know-how Volodymyr Semynozhenko, the new centrism is based on uniting the market foundations and social values, economic effectiveness and social justice, competition and solidarity (Den, June 19, 2000). The political processes, planned to take place this fall, are expected to demonstrate the ability and commitment to implement the new centrism idea. Otherwise, if the election campaign is still far ahead, what's the point of spending resources?

The right-wing parties have also shared the general awareness of the need to consolidate political forces in case the parliament is dissolved as one of the outcomes of the implementation process. A newly-elected representative of the oligarchs, ex-chairman of the Naftogas Ukrainy Igor Bakai joined the Reformy-Kongress faction and has recently announced the intention to unite, in addition to the Party of Reforms and Order and the Congress of Ukrainian Nationalists, both successor parts of the Rukh. The new political alliance in the parliament, so far referred to as Pravytsya (The Right Hand) will soon become the second largest one after the communists, Bakai promises (Molod Ukrainy, July 20, 2000). So far the declaration has received little enthusiasm and support of representatives of the two Rukhs. Specifically, Les Taniuk, member of the People's Rukh of Ukraine (led by Udovenko) commented Igor Bakai's proposals as follows: the rumor that is being spread nowadays looks like a political grimace. It has not anything to do with the unification. They want to buy again? That has happened before. Maybe, they will buy someone. But not many... I think in autumn we will see how the collision is resolved and whether the right national-patriotic factions have a common leader (Molod Ukrainy, July 20, 2000). A similar opinion was expressed by Pavlo Movchan, member of the faction of the Ukrainian People's Rukh (led by Kostenko): obviously, all oligarchs depend on the power [-holders]. And Bakai will not form any Pravytsya. It is also unlikely that the Beautiful Ukraine devotees may be able to influence the distribution of forces in the parliament and, moreover, take control over other factions. Of course, there are some that are going to be bought - we know them by names (Molod Ukrainy, July 20, 2000). Well, *a la guerre comme a la guerre*...

Whether the present-day preparations of political parties is really consolidation of forces before the early elections or whether it is just routine training remains to be seen when amending the Constitution takes place. Although the regular election time is only slightly more than a year and a half away, many questions remain unanswered. Will there be a new election law? If so, what will it look like? And what is to be done with the idea of introducing a bicameral legislature? To date, the implementation draft has been prepared by the working group, led by Presidential chief of staff Volodymyr Lytvyn and First Deputy Speaker Victor Medvedchuk. According to the draft, the parliamentary elections for both of the chambers will be purely majoritarian, i.e., will take place in single-member constituencies. The bicameral parliament will consist of two chambers: the House of Regions and the House of People's Representatives (as quoted by the Interfax-Ukraine). According to the presidential decree, the drafts should be ready by the end of 2000. The proposed return to the purely majoritarian election system makes the prospects for further development of political parties in Ukraine indefinite. The proposal to return to the majoritarian system was rather unexpected and inconsistent, given the fact that the 14th parliament was elected through a mixed (proportionate-majoritarian) system, and the idea for the next elections was to abolish the majoritarian system and hold party-based elections. On the other hand, the majoritarian system leaves very little hope for the Communists to win a substantial number of seats in the next parliament.

The current political mosaics do not allow definite forecasts of specific political parties' election chances. Yet, party leaders do not seem concerned with the lack of clarity and transparency. They are getting ready for any options - just to be on the safe side.